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LIFE IN A CALLEJÓN

A Study of Urban Disorganization

by Richard W. Patch

June 1961

In Lima callejón is most importantly a way of life, linked to the physical callejón, one of the many walled enclosures in the center of the city. It serves to identify those who live there far more than their occupations or earnings. (The word callejón normally means narrow alley or mountain pass, but it has been used by Limeños to designate these enclosures which are reached from the street by a narrow passage between small, tightly packed stores and houses.)

The callejón--there may be several in the interior of a single city block--has a central patio surrounded, and sometimes nearly filled, by rows of attached cells or rooms. Each room, sometimes divided by partitions, is occupied by a family which considers the room its house and home, where children are born and the dead are watched. The inhabitants of the callejón are not transients. The concentration of humanity is nearly at its possible maximum. In the callejón I have chosen to describe 158 people live and die in a space the size of an average Brooklyn houselot. Their total facilities are two water taps over a sink in the center of the patio and a single latrine nearby.

The callejoneros comprise a majority of the

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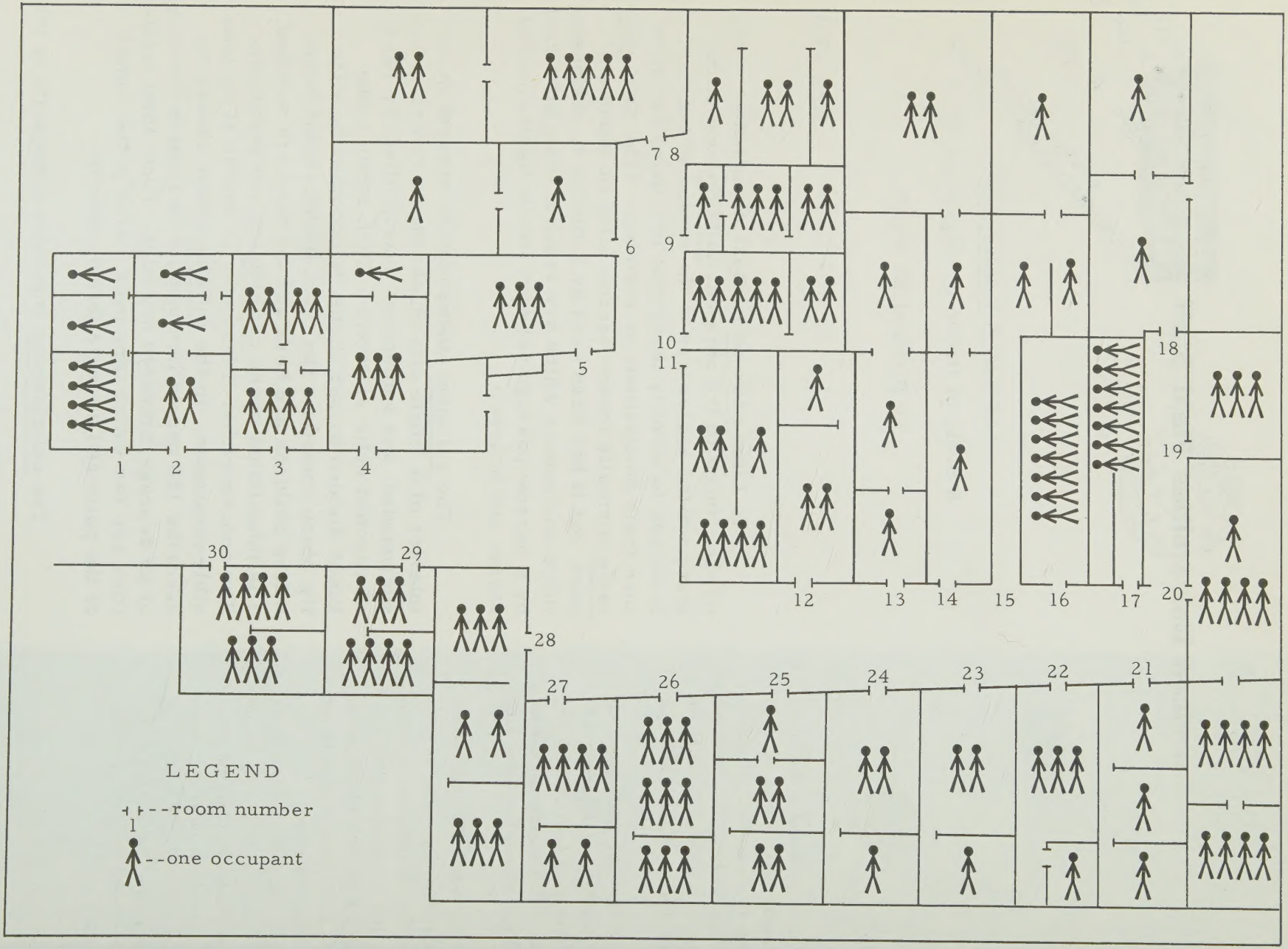
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LEGEND
--room number
--one occupant

population of Lima. The men are the bus, truck, and taxi drivers, carpenters, masons, painters, and factory workers. Many work only occasionally and live precariously on their wives' laundry earnings, or the few soles brought home by children after "guarding" automobiles, selling newspapers or lottery tickets, of shining shoes.

The callejones are quite different from another distinctive housing feature of Lima, the barriadas. The barriadas are the relatively recent squatter shantytowns which have grown up on unoccupied state and private lands at the outskirts of the city. The inhabitants of the barriadas have thrown up their own dwellings--usually of woven reed mats in Lima's dessicated climate--roughly following a plan of streets. They (a tenth of Lima's population) pay no rent, acknowledge no landlord, and wait for the day they will be confirmed in their claim to the land. The callejoneros, in contrast, are tenants.

View from the entrance of the callejón.

This Report is not a sociological study of the behavior of the city's callejoneros. More in the ethnographic style, it describes a single callejón in some depth, using so far as possible the inhabitants' own words and conversations. This callejón is near the middle of the scale of such units. It is located in the section of Lince, a somewhat newer part of Lima, but it is not dignified by the appellation of "Quinta" as are some. Neither is it disgraced by a nickname (such as "The Ship") as are others in the area which are harbors for a criminal element. Nor is it as filthy and dilapidated as the callejones of Rimac--the original Lima of Francisco Pizarro. It is a unit which can stand as typical of Lima's lower class: neither pretentious nor completely demoralized, and not filled with criminals.

Not only is this Report the story of a callejón, it is also the story of one of its inhabitants who has a keen eye and a keener memory. He provided most of the data on which the Report is based. The respondent is only eighteen years old, but his unusual power of observation and variety of experience afford us a unique record of life in a callejón that is at the same time apart from and a part of the large city. From his autobiographical data and observations certain general conclusions can be made.

A Callejonero and His Callejón

I am called Juan Ocoña. I live in Lince in a callejón of 30 families; my

Young Juan.

room is No. 22. At least Ocoña is the name I bear--it happened this way: my father would not marry my mother, and when I was born he would not recognize me. When my mother went to register my birth she was so angry she asked the registrar his name, which was Ocoña. When the registrar asked the name of the child, she answered, "Juan Ocoña." Since then I have borne the name not of my father but of the registrar.

My mother is Benigna Mamani, born 42 years ago in Ayachucho.[1] Ever since she was very young her profession has been that of cook. She came early to Lima, and I was born only a block from where we live now. We lived there only three years when we had to leave because I fought much with the son of the patrona. I say patrona because she was the owner of the house where my mother worked and we lived. My mother went in search of work and found it in the house of a family of Cajamarca.[1] They were very good, but I fought with the son of the mayordomo and this patrona did not like the noise, so within a year we were forced to leave. And so my mother worked for one family after another, but for some reason none of the posts lasted very long. When I was nine years old she met my stepfather who is called Diógenes and is now sixty-five years old. He had passed his life in the mines of the sierra and as foreman of an hacienda. My mother intended to better her situation and mine by marrying him, but this was not to be. It was through him we came to live in this damnable callejón.

When he asked for my mother in matrimony we thought my stepfather was a good man. Little by little he lost what affection he had for my mother. For many years he had drunk a great deal, and after they married he began to drink himself insensible every night. He never came with the sound of peace, but to speak nasty words and strike my mother. The people of the callejón took notice of this; small children would run after him when he was drunk and scream "pirate" at him, partly because of his disposition and partly because one of his eyes is crooked. He became very crabbed and gross, a man without culture, tired of life, his ambitions exhausted. In his youth he had much money, but he misspent it on drink, diversion, and women--which he now regrets. His horrid vocabulary has brought him an evil reputation, and he is always beating my mother. She has become sick from it.

II

The center of life in the callejón is the sink just outside room No. 3.

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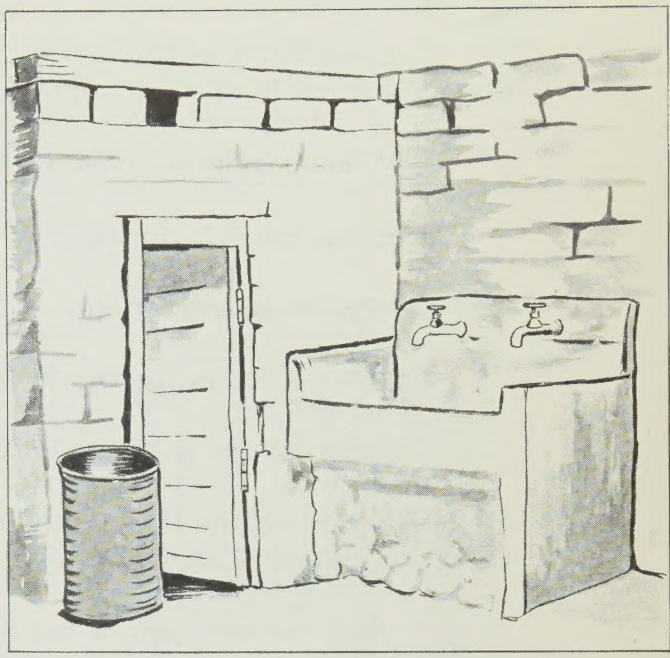
[1] A town in the sierra.

There, at the only source of water, the "Water Faucet Congress" [Congreso del Caño] meets three times a day: at 10:00, at noon, and at 6:00. The women gather to fill their pots, pails, and jugs, and to gossip about all the happenings of the callejón. Then, when the women are talking or carrying water to their rooms, is the time when peddlers like to come into the callejón to hawk their wares. One of the favorites is Don Jacoibo who invariably begins by shouting, "A very good morning gentlemen, young ladies, old men, old women, young people, adults, and little ones."



Meeting place of the Congreso del Caño.

On this day his first stop was at No. 10 which is opposite the water taps and is the home of the Señora Margot. Don Jacoibo knocks at the door and says, "Let us see you, Señora Margot. Are you there? Don't hide, because my little account is very small."

Señora Margot emerges and answers, "A very good morning to you, avaricious Jew. When will you stop knocking down my door?"

"When you pay me, pues."

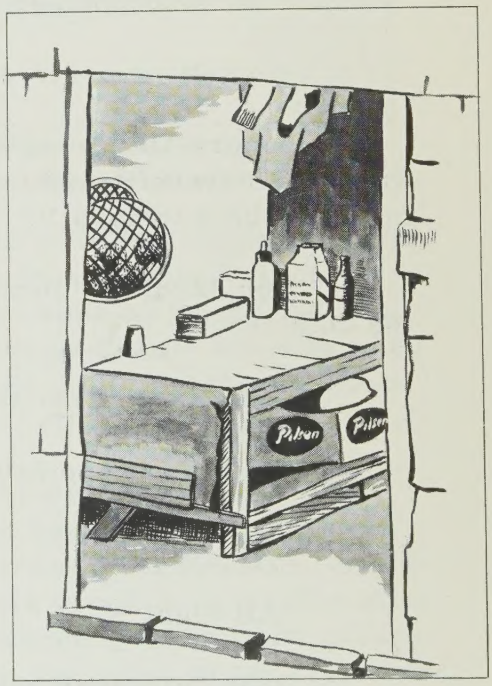
"Well, well then, how much do I owe you?"

"There are only 90 soles that still remain unpaid."[2]

"Take these 30 soles on account and don't bother me more."

"Aha, you see, you give me only 30 soles and you don't want me to come knocking at your door."

"Enough gibbering and tell me what you bring."



Room No. 10.

[2] It is difficult to assign a precise exchange rate to the Peruvian sol throughout this account because it has varied in value in the years covered from about US$.16 to US$.04. At the time of Don Jacoibo's visit it was worth US$.05.

Jacoibo answers, "Ah . . . I have fine blankets, enamelware wash basins, and very pretty percales."

Doña Julia of No. 2 interrupts, "Let's see the percales, but in the first place, how much do they cost?"

"Cheap, nomas, cheap--a special price for you, Señora."

"How much? Speak!"

"Ten soles the meter."

"What! That stuff is in the market at 8 soles."

"Ah, but the price went up a long time ago."

"You believe that just because the dollar has gone up that you can raise the price of all your merchandise."

"It's not because of the dollar, Señora, but because this cloth is of especially good quality."

"No, what's happened is you are becoming very expensive."

"In selling percale one earns very little."

Señora Margot returns to the discussion. "You don't earn much? You won't tell anyone the amount of money you are making. Your poor mattress must be about to burst!"

Don Jacoibo: "Don't believe it, Señora, because all is spent on food and the children."

Doña Julia: "Ya, shut up--8 soles and I'll take 3 meters."

"Señora, not to prolong the argument, 9 soles."

"No, 8 soles."

"All right."

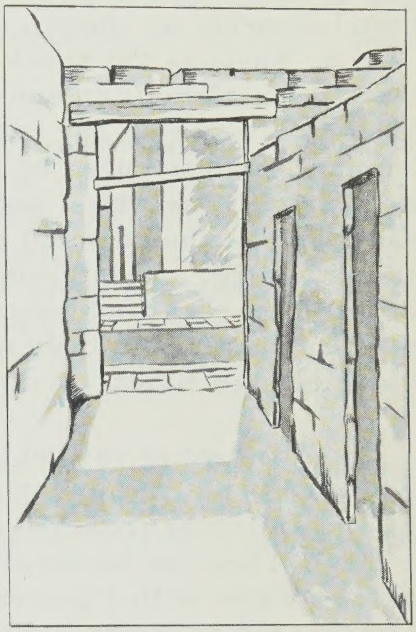
Doña Julia with her last word, "You must think my husband manufactures money."

Doña Margot: "How much are the blankets?"

* * * * *

This Doña Julia lives in No. 2 with her husband and two children. The husband, Don Manuel, is a bricklayer and earns 42 soles a day. For the house he pays 150 soles a month, and 10 soles for light. He is a specialist in the construction of farm buildings, which is a help for the larder because he can steal chickens and eggs to feed his children. But that wife, Doña Julia, is a fast one [pendeja]. She has relations with another man who lives next door, and is younger than Don Manuel, who is forty-two. Everybody knows, even the husband, but he has to keep quiet because he loves her and wants her to stay with him. Only once did they fight--when he was drunk.

Another Doña Julia who lives in No. 3 is the same way. She lives with Don Antonio who is called "Pulpo" [octopus] and is a fisherman. They are not married. Don Antonio has a wife and she has a husband, but they have lived together for 17 years and have six children; the oldest is seventeen. Don Antonio is always hitting Doña Julia because he finds men playing cards in his house and his woman smoking with them. But she has to do this because he does not give her enough money for food for the children--sometimes he gives her 30 soles for a whole week. She has to sell herself for food and money so the children can go to school. The children usually eat only twice a day: a cup of coffee and a piece of bread in the morning, and a plate of beans with rice and a cup of tea at noon. They eat at night only if something is left over.



View from Room No. 13 toward the street.

Señora Margot (or Margarita) lives in No. 10 with Don Herminio. She is usually called "La Chuncha"[3] because she comes from Iquitos.[4] Don Herminio used to be an amateur boxing champion. Now, when he works, he is a bricklayer. But he seldom works, and is very violent and beats his wife when she answers him back. They live next door to No. 11, "The Witchcraft Room" as it is called in the callejón.

La bruja Lula [the witch Lula] lives in No. 11 with her husband Don Jorge and their six children. This Señora dedicates herself to working evil on the people of the callejón. Her custom is on Tuesdays and Fridays, at midnight or early dawn, to smoke a package of cigarettes two at a time. She does this while repeating the name of the person she is working against and calling on the devil to send him an illness. Then she mixes the ashes of the cigarettes

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[3] A low class or ignorant person who comes from the sierra or the eastern montaña.

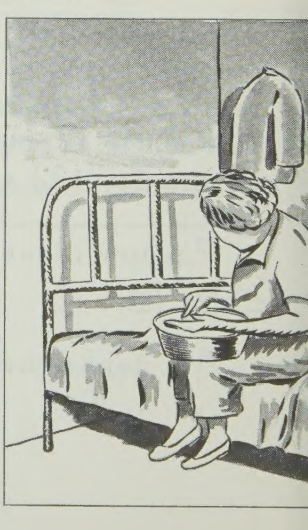
[4] A department and its capital in the Amazon lowlands.

with earth from a grave and a dead man's hair burned with bloodstained cotton --all this is tied in cotton cloth and then stuck with a dozen pins and smeared with blood. The small bundle is thrown against the door of the person being bewitched. She has done this to many persons in the callejón sometimes together with other witches of the place. Her husband knows about it, but does not say anything because even he fears her.

Witchcraft is very different from the practice of the curanderos [curers]. The curers are called into the callejón when someone is suffering from susto [surprise or shock], or the ojeo [evil eye], or any sickness induced by a witch. Susto is the shock or fear brought on by something unexpected: the attack of an animal, an automobile accident, falling into water, or the splashing of cold water on any part of the body. It happens mainly to young children. Common susto is cured by a curandero who takes three carnations, one red, one pink, and one white, and dips them in holy water. Passing them over the naked body of the afflicted person he makes the sign of the cross. It is done after midnight, and following the treatment the curer must turn his back and go to the nearest ditch or road without looking around. Susto from water is cured by rubbing the body with three pieces of bread and calling the patient by name three times. It must be done either on a Tuesday or Friday.

The ojeo is caused by an adult looking too hard at a child. It may be prevented if the child carries a red ribbon in his right hand. Parents know a child is suffering from the evil eye when he no longer has any desire for food or play. They can be sure when his forehead tastes of salt. It may be cured in three ways: with a guinea pig, with flowers, or with a fresh egg. The child is undressed and rubbed with a guinea pig while he says three Hail Marys and three Our Fathers; after this the animal is buried in the middle of a street. When using flowers the best variety is the red carnation. One is rubbed over the body in the pattern of a cross while three Hail Marys and three Our Fathers are said; after this the flower is thrown in the middle of a street or ditch. As part of the egg cure, three Hail Marys and three Our Fathers are said before the rubbing. Then the curer passes the egg over the body, which cleans it. The egg is placed in cold water, then broken in a glass which is given the child to beat with a small stick.

III



Now I will speak of me. Before coming to the callejón I studied in the school called "El Rosal." My mother came to work there as a cook. But she worked there only four months--until I finished my first year--and then left for reasons she never explained to me. But by then I knew how to read, and I took charge of reading the advertisements of houses which needed cooks. My mother does not know how to read and always had depended on friends to find work for her. I finally found work for her in San Isidro [a section of Lima].

In my second year in the school I was the slackest student of all. I was always playing, behaving rudely, even sitting on top of the worktable. Only in English was I first in the class. The directoress wanted to throw me out of the school, but she did not do it because she taught English and I was her best pupil. I was crazy to learn English, even then.

Once, I remember, they punished me because I begged for money at the doors of a cinema. It was not because I needed the money [for food] but because I wanted to go in the theater. A girl I knew saw me and told the profesora. They punished me severely and called my mother to ask why I did such a thing.

It was at this time that my mother married my stepfather. He was always bringing us gifts and I thought him a good man. When my mother told her patrona she was to be married, the patrona asked her to bring the man and present him to her. When he came he acted very much the gentleman, and the patrona gave her blessing, believing him to be an old man, full of experience, and good for my mother. But it was not so. He took my mother and me from this place where she worked and where we had lived happily--to take us to a callejón.

Then I lacked only three months to complete my third year. Always slack and studying little, I am sincere in saying that I was not much a friend of study. My stepfather paid the three months (it being a private school) and then got tired of it. He put me in a public school.

Now I began a new life. The people of the callejón were different, they were more vulgar and common than those I had been with in the old school. Even the smallest children spoke words I had not used in my life. So in the public school they called me "The Baby" because I was tranquil, if a bit playful, but not playful in the ways they were. I did not use bad words.

Little by little my stepfather lost his affection for me and I realized that his actions in the beginning had been a lie. When he got drunk I had to look for him in the bars and bring him home, taking his money from him and giving it back when he was sober. He began to beat me, not much at first, but he was beginning to hate me. Once he sent me for a bottle of wine and the storekeeper gave me vinegar by mistake. My stepfather threw the bottle at my head and cut my eyebrow.

There came a time when I tired of this treatment. Once when he hit me I said to my mother, "Why does he do this? He is not my father."

He answered, "If I am not his father, there is no reason for me to maintain him, or buy him anything."

I replied, "Then I will sell newspapers and maintain myself."

The next day I went to the newspaper vendor who has a place on the corner. I told him I wanted to make money, and to do it by helping him. He agreed I could sell newspapers for him, and we would split the profit. So I began to rise at 5:30 a.m. and sell papers until noon. This made me very happy--I was making my own money, sometimes 80 centavos or a sol a day, and still going to school in the afternoon. My mother kept the money for me until one day I had about 50 soles and decided to buy a shirt and a pair of trousers.

Well, that afternoon my mother took me to buy the trousers and a flannel shirt, and I put them on the next day. That day I was content. Every moment I looked at the clothing and would say to myself, "Someday I will have more--a whole closetful like this."

My work was not bad and the money was good, I thought then. I continued selling for this master until one day he gave me a great many papers which I took to sell in the center of town. A little kid said, "I'll help you," and I gave him some papers to sell so that he might earn a little. He left with my papers, but he did not come back. I cried because I had no money to pay for the papers he had robbed me of.

I decided to stop working with my master and to buy and sell papers on my own. This went well, until finally I had the capital to buy and sell lottery tickets. Then I put together a capital of 100 soles and was earning from 15 to 25 a day.

But I would return very late to the house. This my stepfather did not like and he would hit me. I complained and he said, "If you don't want me to hit you, get out. I don't need you, you are a nuisance, we don't want you here." I wanted to leave then, but I needed more money to be able to feed myself and pay for a room, so I had to stand it.

I saw that shining shoes gave more money than selling papers and lottery tickets, so I bought a box and began to shine shoes. When my stepfather saw the box he said, "Carajo, I don't want you to shine shoes. What will people say of us? You are ruining the honor of the family!" And he smashed the box.

I told him: "If you do not want me to shine shoes, give me money to study again in 'El Rosal.'" He refused, and at last let me shine shoes.

So I went again to work around the Plaza San Martín. There I knew many of the boys who were also shining shoes. They were Monkey, Little Flea, Popcorn [Maíz de Ecopetín], Clock, Little Carlos, Alliance, Bedbug, Rat, and many others. They baptized me with the name "Burro Blanco," but usually just called me Burro. When we were not working we would get together at night to play ball in the Plaza, and to bother [joder--an indecent

word] everyone who passed. We formed a club called the Rag Sporting [Deportivo Trapo--from the rag kickball used in the game] and after midnight we would play against the Canillitas [Little Shinbones]. But many times we could not play because the Alligator, that is the police truck, would appear and chase us away. Sometimes they would chase and catch us, and take us to the Sixth [Comisaría, or police station]. We called this the "Summer Hotel" and they would keep us there a few hours while we shined the Captain's or the Commandant's shoes.

Little Flea knew the Hotel best, because they caught him [lo chapaban] all the time. There were certain police [tombos] who we knew as bad ones. The two worst were those called Duck Face and the Chinaman. They were always bothering us around the places we worked: the Plaza San Martín, the Hotel Bolívar, the Hueco en la Pared, and the Bar Zela. We would always stick together in a band [andábamos en collera]. We earned the most when the sailors came up from Callao [the port of Lima]. Then we had plenty of work. We would steal the cigarettes they kept in their socks and, when they were drunk, their money. I was learning some English and was able to "sweet-talk" them [los chamullaba] and get them to give me money. We would take them to a brothel where the madam would pay us three soles for every gringo.

In summer we went to the beach from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To pay for the bathing tent and the bus fare we would shine shoes in the bars and ask for food there. Sometimes we would go with Big Gringo [Gringote] who knew how to steal bathing trunks from the bus passengers. After using them all day we sold them. We robbed the tents. Monkey and I stood watch while Big Gringo and Hatchet Face, who were the most skilled at thieving [más choros], would make a hole at the rear of the tent, go inside, and steal everything of value except clothes. I remember once we had good luck and got away with two watches and about 300 soles. But often we had no luck and barely got the three soles each for bus fare.

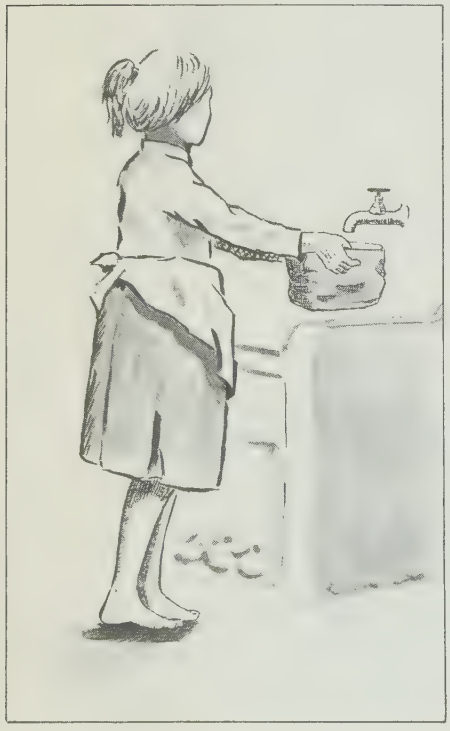
I continued shining shoes and studying in school--where they made fun of me, calling me "bootblack." By now I was in the fifth year, and still not very intelligent. But the teachers liked me because I was quick [vivo]. I liked the teachers, and even shined the director's shoes. When I finished primary school the sister-in-law of my stepfather wanted to adopt me and bring me up. At first when she spoke to my mother I thought it was a good idea because then I could go to secondary school, which was what I most wanted. I wanted to follow a military career, or become an engineer, and the sister-in-law of my stepfather said I could, if I made the effort. But I did not like the household. I stayed there three days, and then returned to my own home.

IV

It was about this time that old Don Jacinto died in No. 14, almost across from my room. He had worked in a sweater factory and only earned 30 soles a day. But he was able to filch sweaters from the factory and sell them in the callejón very cheaply, and still make a bit of money. He was an old man, but violent. He contradicted everyone, like all old men. He was seldom happy and he did not like liquor--but he did like women. He had lost all ambition, never trying to find other employment, or to move out of the callejón where he lived for 17 years. He got up at 6:00 a.m. and prepared breakfast for the family, was at the factory by 7:30, and worked until 6:30 p.m., except for lunchtime from 11:30 to 2:30--a rough life for a man of sixty-one. He did not complain, although one could see he was ill. And when they tried to send him to a doctor he said no, don't bother, they are all a tribe of crazy people and liars.

He was full of bitterness. His 30 years of marriage was a continual fight with his old wife. He managed to fight with most of the neighbors of the callejón. When he would go to get water he would take an enormous drum which was the reservoir of his house. In the long time it took to fill this he would let no one else take water in their little pots and pails. Because of this the husband of Doña Margot once hit him. Struggles, arguments, and fights helped finish the life of old Jacinto.

One Sunday morning bright with sunlight when everyone thought it was going to be a happy day there was a disturbance in the callejón. Old Jacinto was dead of a heart attack. It was a shock for his wife and children, and for the few of the callejón who liked him. That night all the neighbors of the callejón gathered to sit on the ground outside No. 14 where old Jacinto's body lay. They kept him company all night drinking bottles of pisco [Peruvian aguardiente theoretically made of grapes] and caña [sugar alcohol], and telling off-color stories. In all they drank around three dozen bottles of pisco and smoked quantities of cigars and black cigarettes. Adults and little ones stayed with the coffin. A few cried, but very few. Some accompanied the body to the cemetery the next morning. At first it seemed that the death greatly affected the wife and children, but after a month the callejón knew it was not so. Because then, on the birthday of the oldest son, the family gave a fiesta, dancing and drinking and putting off their black clothes.



This was a bad time for the rooms near mine. Next door, in No. 21, lived a policeman, twenty-eight years old, with his wife, twenty-six. They were both

from Apurimac and had lived only a short time in the callejón--just five years. Don Germán, called "El Tombo," worked in the barracks of La Perricholi. He had two children with his wife. When they first came they seemed very happy. They laughed and talked together, and went out together. They were content and were often visited by their relations. But now the opposite is the case.

El Tombo [the cop], who seemed a good person, happy, and friendly, abandoned his wife and two children. She went to the barracks to inform the police that her husband had deserted her. They gave her a letter from him which said he had left the house because he no longer liked her, he was tired of her, and he had found someone better. He would send some milk and a bit of money from time to time. She showed the letter to his superiors, and they arrested him.

The police talked to Don Germán, trying to get him to return to his house and family. He refused, saying he could not be happy with her, that he would support the children, but would not give her a single centavo. She accepted, but began to cry and tried to scratch his face.

One day she followed him from the barracks to find out where he lived and to see his new woman. He entered an old callejón in Rimac, and soon came out with the woman. The wife, Doña Leonor, ran up behind them and pushed the woman, crying furiously, "You are the shameless one who took my husband from me," and began to pull her hair. They fought and Don Germán tried to separate them, but Doña Leonor threw a stone which struck him on the forehead. People called the police who came and took all three to the station. Both sides told their stories. Don Germán said that he could not make his wife happy. Doña Leonor told him, "You could if you were more of a man but I know you are not, and you wear pants only by custom." For this he nearly hit her right there in the police station. The police let them go one by one.

Doña Leonor came crying back to her house and went to bed around 10:00. At 10:30 there was a pounding at the door. When she opened it a crack there stood her husband, almost out of his mind because of what she had said that afternoon. He kicked open the door and began to beat her. The children woke and screamed, rousing the whole callejón. The little one of six years ran to my house and to others yelling that his father was beating his mother. Some of us got up and went to the house, but we were too late. El Tombo ran and escaped over the roof. His wife lay on the floor with cut lips, eyes bruised and swelling and full of tears; her whole body was badly hurt. We called a police car which took her to the Public Assistance Station. After a few days she came back. Now she has the belief that by smoking two cigarettes at a time she can make her former husband fight with the new woman. She has begun to work as a cook. And so she continues to live, but always cursing her husband and smoking pairs of cigarettes every night.

V

I decided to enter secondary school. While I was shining shoes, selling lottery tickets and magazines, I was still studying and preparing myself. In the examination I secured a grade of 60 and was able to enter the school "Melitón Carbajál." It was free, but the matriculation, the uniforms, the books, and all the rest cost money. By working I was able to pay for them. At first it went well, but later I broke down. I made low grades. I could not study and work at the same time. I was working until late and kept failing the examinations, and in conduct I was still playful and a trickster [juguetón y palomilla]. I came late to school after the long nights and there was no time for study because as soon as I would get out of school I would begin shining shoes. I gave some money to the house because my stepfather said if I did not, he would kick me out. My mother was about to have a baby, so I took her to the Maternity Hospital. Then I helped in the house, getting food for my stepfather when he came from work.

I continued in school until October, and then left. I could not do it any more. But I did not give in as conquered. God helped me. I made a friend who helped. Every time I shined his shoes he gave me 50 or 100 soles. I continued working and saving money, and my friend who was English and a good man, helped a great deal. Finally I had enough to matriculate in a school where one paid, called the "Gimnacio Peruano." There I paid 120 soles a month plus 50 for examinations. It brought back many memories of the other private school I had attended. But I had changed. I felt strange in a school of this sort which was no longer of my class. I had become converted into a person of the poor class, of the poor people. The other students were of families more or less well off. At first I tried to hide my identity, that they might not know who I was, how I worked, or where I lived, because if they came to know where I lived they would make fun of me. I heard them talking of others who lived in callejones. Their brutal talk made me want to break their mouths, but I had to hold it in. Only two in the school were my friends. The rest looked at me, but they would not speak to me. I imagine they knew who I was--just from my way of speaking and my slang [jerga]. They were surely saying, "This one is a callejonero." But they never said it to my face; they were afraid and knew I would hit them.

But I was not happy in the school. I had to look after my mother and my little sister. My mother was beginning now with her illness. It still was not alarming, but it advanced steadily. I worked every night and studied in the days for eight months. I had begun to control myself--now I was neither a roamer of the streets nor playful [mataperro ni juguetón]. My grades were neither good nor bad. Because I worked at night I would fall asleep in the afternoon classes. One teacher saw me in the street shining shoes late at night. He always taunted me about it. Once I drowsed in his class, and he came up to hit me. But I told him, "Ya, Señor, I will not go to sleep again."

He replied, "I am going to beat you for being a no-good." He slapped me with a hand on which he wore a big ring. I retreated and he backed me against a wall. I told him not to hit me. He paid no attention, and kept hitting me until I kicked him in the chest. I jumped off the chair I was standing on and ran outside. I never went back to the school, first because I feared the teacher, and second because I owed the school payment for two months. I never went back to any school. My illusions about going to school were not lost. I kept thinking about going back once more, but it was not to be. I never went back, not because I did not want to, but because I could not.

Shining shoes again, and practicing English. My mother worse and worse. I worked day and night. Then I had the chance to attach myself to a filming expedition in the jungle. I left 300 soles with my stepfather to take care of my sick mother and my little sister, and went off on July 1 to Pulcallpa. [A town on the Ucayali River, a tributary of the Amazon.] I worked there three months, then my stepfather sent me a letter that my mother was ill, and he was also. He had to go into the hospital. So I returned to Lima on the first truck, nervous, thinking that something had happened to my mother --or worse.

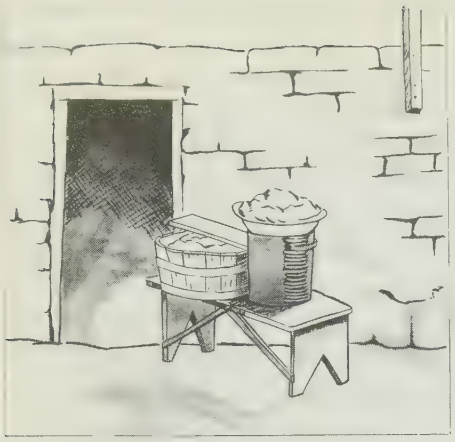
After the three months away I was also discontented to be coming back once again to this greasy, grimy callejón which little by little I had come to hate. It was no place for a family, much less for 30 families. I arrived after three days, at 10:00 in the morning. I went to my house and found my mother there as always, no change for better or worse. Only my stepfather was now also ill. My little sister was playing in the alley.

I did not feel good coming back to the callejón. It seemed as if I no longer lived there. And I had been away only three months. I said, "The jungle was so beautiful, why did I return here?" And within myself I answered, "If it had not been for my mother I would never have come back."

In the callejón one hears only vile talk and the sound of fights every day and every night. At the same moment I was thinking this, a fight broke out at the water taps. It was the woman of No. 10, Señora Margot (La Chuncha), screaming at the laundress of No. 16. They were fighting because Señora Margot had put a chamber pot on top of the clean laundry of the laundress. The latter shouted, "Chuncha of ------, you don't know what you are doing!"

"I did it accidentally."

The laundress continued with her insults until Señora Margot picked up the pot and threw it at the laundress. The laundress yelled, "Get out of here this minute if you don't want me to break your head!"



Señora Margot picked up a stone and threw it at the laundress' stomach, and the laundress began to pick up the laundry table. But I and another boy of the callejón separated them, and only then did they cease to fight.

Thus once more there was a fight. I was tired of hearing fights every day, in the callejón, in my house, and where I worked.

Tired of everything I stretched out to get some sleep although it was still morning. But I could not sleep for the noise around me, so I got up and told my mother I was going for a walk. I met a friend who invited me to lunch and asked if I were studying. I said no, but I might go back someday. That afternoon I went to see a friend who is a woman of the streets. I told her about my trip. It was a long time since I had been with a woman, and I told her I wanted to be with her. She said, all right; I asked, how much; she said, nothing. But she wanted me to bring gringos to her and not to others.

The next day I picked up my box and once again I began to shine shoes. In the center of the city they yelled at me, "What's up Burro? Where have you been? We thought you were dead." And so I was back in the Plaza San Martín.

Not a month passed before I was attacked by an illness of the feet. It appeared first on the left one, then on the right one, and I could not work because I could not walk. I had to cut the shoes off my feet, but I could not stay in bed because there was no one else to feed my mother now that my stepfather was in the hospital. Friends lent me 5 and 10 soles and I would buy a little something for my mother. The sore on my right foot became steadily larger, and I was trying to cure it with oxygenated water. It needed penicillin but I had no money to buy it. The wounds became more and more infected. I had only one friend in the callejón who shared his breakfasts with me and gave me money to buy food for my mother. I was ashamed that he should have to invite me to breakfast, and after a while I did not go back. I would stop eating for two and three days at a time. My mother gave me a little from what I bought for her. But I could not keep doing this: taking food from my mother when she needed it. Then I could go four and five days without eating. I was lucky that I did not faint. It was strange, I could go a week without eating and nothing happened. Sometimes I would feel violent hunger, but it would pass.

I knew that a woman in the callejón gave meals, and finally I resolved to talk with her. I went and told her I wanted to eat but I had no money to pay her, but would when the foot was cured. She said, all right, and asked what was the matter with my foot. I said it was infected. She replied that it looked very bad and something should be done or they might have to cut off the foot. Why didn't

I go to the drugstore and have some injections? I told her I did not have any money. She asked to see the foot. Then she told one of her sons to get oxygenated water and penicillin in powder, and she began to cure me. She did this every day. I asked her, "Señora, how am I going to pay you for all this?"

She answered, "Don't worry yourself, it won't cost you anything. I also have children, and I know how your mother is." My foot was bad for a month; then it got well and I went back to shining shoes. What I earned I gave to the Señora for all she had done for me.

VI

The Carnivals were approaching and I worked harder than ever to save a little to go to a fiesta.[5] I did put together enough but as it turned out I did not go any place in particular; however I did meet a girl--the second girl of my life.

My friends and I were playing with water in the callejón as we always do at Carnival time. Every year we throw water from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and afterward we use mud and paint. Around 3:00 o'clock some other friends came looking for me to go to the house of two girls who were celebrating with plenty of water. I filled a large number of balloons with water and dye and went there with my friends. We had hardly arrived when we began to run to try to catch one of the girls and get her wet. The one we chased ran into the house, and we followed her before we realized that two more girls were behind us and shut the door on us. These two entered by another door and the four began to shout, "Grab them and throw them in the tub." And so it was. They got hold of my friend and me and put us in the bathtub which was full of water. In dripping clothes we began to paint each other with shoe polish and red dye. We looked like a couple of clowns going out of that house. Afterward we sat down in front of the house to wait for the girls. Edith (who was to become my girl) came out with her cousin and invited me and my friend to see the parade of beauty queens which was to come down the Avenida Arequipa. But we were late so we went to the park of San Isidro instead.

VII

Now I found myself in a difficult situation. My stepfather was leaving the hospital and I had to take care of him as well as feed my mother, my little sister, and myself. When he arrived my stepfather asked why I had not paid the rent. I told him that what I made was not enough for everything. He replied that it was enough, but what happened was that I spent money on diver-

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[5] Carnavales is the traditionally observed time before Lent, variable in length, and corresponding to the Mardi Gras season. It is typically celebrated by elaborate costume fiestas, and by trying to catch others unaware with water, dyes, ink, paint, mud, confetti, ether, talcum powder, and flour.

sions and trips. And, that if I were not going to pay, it would be better if I and my mother would get out of his house. I told him I was going to leave, but I did not.

Always when my stepfather came into the house drunk he would say it would be better if my mother and I left, because I did not give money for the house. Finally I decided to retire from shining shoes. It was because not only did it not give much money, but also the police were beginning to bother me very much around the Hotel Bolívar. So I decided to become a tourist guide. In the first days it went very badly. There were few tourists, it was winter, and I belonged to no agency and had to look for the tourists myself. But I worked at it for two years, and slowly began to learn it more thoroughly.

At night I would find girls for the gringos--which brought a nice quantity of soles. I had a commission from the tourist, one from the girl, and one from the taxi driver. Sometimes one earned well, sometimes nothing. One knew a different class of people: women of the streets, homosexuals, all that is rolled up in the night life. The worst of it was that one passed very bad nights. I would drink too much with the tourists and the women, and I began to lose weight because I would be with a woman nearly every night. But it gave me the opportunity to know the members of a steel band from Trinidad. At first I interpreted for them because they did not know Spanish, then I played the maracas and the fushe with them. I also got to know some exiled Cubans who asked me to get marijuana for them. I looked for a boy who sold it but did not find him. Anyway I decided it would be best not to mix in this, it would be bad for me. I met an American who called himself "Nick Diablo, Soldier of Fortune." He talked very little but gradually we became friends. He came to Peru after being kicked out of Panama, or so he told me. He was an alcoholic and I would help him from the bars when he was drunk. When I needed money he gave it to me, and I would do the same for him. Once he drank a whole month without stopping, and when I asked him to stop he said no, he could only stop gradually. He was in Lima for seven months and then went to Bolivia, and I went with him. There I had to leave him because my stepfather asked me to come back to Lima, and Nick Diablo was mixed up in a rebellion and could not get out of the country. I got on the bus with tears falling when he said good-by because I had to leave him alone, with no one to look after him and he needed someone. But he had made my desire to go to the United States even stronger.

I started working in the same thing, but I was beginning to decide that it was not making me much money either. I earned little, and I was spending away my life. I was full up with the work, and with the callejón. Every day arguments in the callejón and arguments with people in the city. Furthermore the life I was leading was not a life. I realized the great lack I had of an education, and I was more and more anxious to get out of Peru.

Finally I found work in a shop where they sold articles made in the

Inca style to tourists. There I was a little better off. I did not earn much but I was away from the night life, which by then sickened me.

If someone reads this story of my life, I wish you vigor of spirit and mind, and I tell you not to fear life but to continue the fight until you have become something, as I continue fighting to gain what I seek. This is my life to this point, but it still lacks what will pass when I leave Peru--which I hope will be soon.

Conclusions

Disorganization

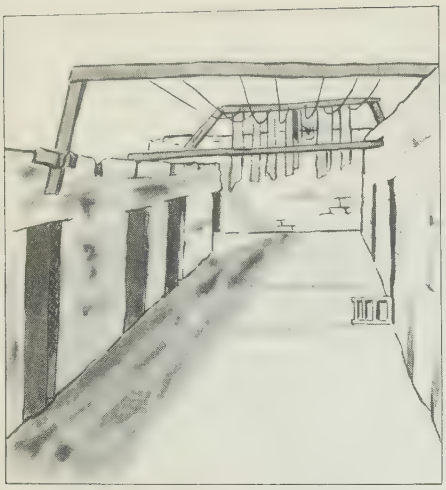
This is only a small selection of the data given by the principal respondent and gathered by observation and interviews in the callejón. But it is sufficient to describe a situation of impressive social disorganization. That is, it is unusual to find a group living permanently in such close physical contact in which so many norms are no longer felt to apply and which have been replaced by so few norms of a new approach to social integration.

The phenomenon is not peculiar to the callejones, nor to Lima. The disorganization is only imperfectly associated with urbanism. The near-collapse of the institution of the family, the lack of identification with organized religion, the decline of the ceremonial kinship system--the co-fathership (compadrazco) which is a strong equilibrating force in many communities undergoing the beginnings of institutional breakdown--are widespread in the lower economic class of coastal Peru, rural and urban alike.

However, the situation is most clearly demonstrated in this Lima callejón where 158 people with common needs and mutual dependencies procreate, marry, and die in virtual social isolation within a space some 20 yards wide by 35 yards long. The disorganization is the result of the invalidation of norms of an agricultural society which once governed the behavior of not only those who immigrated to Lima from the provinces but of those who were born in Lima itself. The generalized agrarian society has been replaced by another which appears to the lower class to offer rewards which are only material, or status (doctor, engineer) obtainable by large material expenditures. And these rewards, although constantly in mind, are beyond the reach of all except a negligible few who achieve exit from the callejón by accident of a small family or by efforts which would seem beyond the capacity of an ordinary human.

Escape

For the others the main preoccupation is escape. Those with small families may achieve it vicariously by giving their children a primary and sec-



ondary education, and--if they are able to forgo the usual necessity of a second or third wage earner in the family--to allow the son or daughter to enter the University of San Marcos. The less fortunate, or ambitious, see their escape in marrying a daughter to someone of the professional class--a doctor, engineer, lawyer, pharmacist, or professor--who may have little enough money, but who lives in a house, has perhaps one servant, would be able to enter the Hotel Bolívar without causing surprise, and who is a member of a class far distant from the callejonero.

But for most the escape is alcohol. Once when the norms of the society were based on an agricultural economy, the fiesta was a means of gaining prestige. Then one saved for months and perhaps years to be the mayordomo or capitán of a feast day. One gained stature in the eyes of his fellows by prodigal spending on drink, food, and music. Now, in the callejones, there are no longer cofradías to give structure or meaning to such celebrations.[6] But the drinking continues: pisco, sugar alcohol, chicha, beer, an indigenous brandy made by adding "essence of cognac" to pure alcohol, wine--anything which intoxicates for a small amount of money. Significantly the drinking is only occasionally a social affair. More often, and usually daily, it is a matter of individuals seeking unconsciousness as quickly and cheaply as possible.

The respondent Juan's escape was more original. Of all the inhabitants of the callejón he had the deepest sense of its degradation. He was also conscious (his awareness was only underlined by his stepfather) that his work shining shoes branded him always as a onetime bootblack and a callejonero. He was less distressed about having worked as a procurer than having shined shoes. In Lima many types and classes do the former, but only the lowest shine shoes. His conclusion was that his only hope for higher status was not only escape from the callejón but from the entire society--from Peru and Latin America. His conception of the United States may be unduly romantic but it is a country where the works of Horatio Alger achieved popularity, while Peru is a country where, in the unlikely event of a translation, such works would be considered not only silly but subversive.

The Family

The best index of the disruption of social institutions of coastal Peru,

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[6] The cofradías were, and are still in the sierra and parts of the coast, confraternities usually organized for the purpose of insuring and structuring the feast day of a community. Officers, those who bear the major expense, are chosen a year in advance. The callejón has such a feast day--that of the Virgin of Fatima--but there is no organized observance of the day.

of which the callejón is taken as an example, is the change in the concept of a family from a relationship among parents and children to a relationship between a mother and her children. The case of the respondent Juan is extreme but it dramatizes a widespread mode. In urban Lima, as throughout the coast of Peru, conjugal unions in the lower class are casual, often multiple, and more often unstable. A man's reply when asked about the number of his children is likely to be "so many with my wife and such a number 'in the street.'" A stepfather is a common personage in families of this class. The remarkable element, however, is that these families do not entirely lose their shape and become simply a man and his sex partner with miscellaneous attached children. The cohesion is supplied by the mother. Even when she (like Juan's mother) is mentally ill, wanders the streets, and must be cared for like a child, she commands respect and devotion from her children which--as V. S. Pritchett has remarked--is incomprehensible to Anglo-Americans. The children of the various unions remain with the mother through an attachment which is one of the last defenses against irreparable social dissolution. The bond, in which the mother figure undoubtedly has a certain affinity to the concept of the Madonna, is also deeply imbedded in a secular ethic which substitutes for religious belief.

In the callejón, as all along the coast of Peru, religious belief has been replaced by the outward observance of the forms of Roman Catholicism by a minority of the women. Children are baptized, in part because of the folk belief in the particular vulnerability of children to evils which include susto and ojeo as well as damnation, but the Baptism may well be the only sacrament which they will receive. Marriages, when they are performed, are usually civil and seldom religious. Men seldom attend Mass and often boast of not having confessed since they were forced to in school. Women attend Mass more often, but any who attend with regularity are cause for special comment as being "muy Católicas."

Ethic

In spite of the small influence exerted by a religious ethic, however, there is an ethic understood and shared by all of the callejón. The first principle is the inviolability of one's personal dignity. A man may degrade himself, but it would be unpardonable for another to degrade him. A man or boy may, through circumstance, put himself beyond the pale of decency by shining shoes and be forced to suffer the consequent jibes and reproaches; but he would be mortally offended by any ridicule which might jeopardize his individual personality. Stealing is not a moral question in itself. The same Spanish word may be used to describe taking cigarettes from a sailor or taking clothes from another room in the callejón. To the callejonero the two are not the same action--stealing cigarettes, money, or watches from a stranger is an act without virtue or malice; but the only case in recent years of a callejonero robbing within the callejón described in this Report is still remembered and discussed as the case of a man who passed all bounds.

Closely allied to personalismo is the concept of machismo (masculinity). Doña Leonor, who was deserted by her husband, attacked him in the most direct and wounding way by accusing him of being less than a man, of "wearing pants only by custom." Machismo is not only the quality of virility which makes desirable a large number of children despite the economic consequences. It is also courage and daring which may inspire a man to do something completely unreasonable simply to demonstrate that he is macho. Both the values of personalismo and machismo are important in the secular ethic, but they reinforce the bent toward disorganization rather than otherwise.

The two values may be taken as representative of the entire ethic; defensive rather than co-operative, related to self rather than to authority. The result is that the social focus is on the smallest denominator--the individual.

Ceremonial Kinship

The drawbacks of such a focus in a functioning society are obvious. In times past the drawbacks were overcome by an unusual emphasis on the unity of the family, and--when the society still derived its modes from an agricultural model--on alliances among families with a great interest in and memory for geneology. Nor was this enough. The biological kinship system was buttressed by an elaborate and effective ceremonial kinship system. A child, by the time of his First Communion, could acquire five auxiliary sets of parents. "Auxiliary parents" is a more appropriate term than the usual translation of padrinos as godparents. Godfather or godmother has a formal, somewhat sophisticated, certainly nonutilitarian sense in English which cannot approach the vital, personal, and responsible sense of padrino in the Spanish of rural Peruvian communities. There today, and previously in all of Peru, the act of becoming a padrino was an important assumption of responsibility for the child and toward the biological parents. The padrino became not only a godfather he became a co-father (compadre). His gift at the ceremony was only a token indicating that if necessary he would take the same responsibility for his godchild as he would for a child of his own. From that time the godfather and the biological father, the godmother and the actual mother would not address one another by name but by relationship--compadre, comadre (co-father, co-mother). Thus, in an uncertain world, the godchild gained a spare set of parents and the adults formed a bond second only to the bond of blood relationship. And it was quite possible, in our derived agricultural society, for the child to acquire five substitute fathers and mothers. He would have padrino and madrina of baptism, of the Misa de Salud (a Mass for health), of his first haircut (rutuco in some dialects of Quechua), of his First Communion, and of Confirmation. It is not likely, but not impossible, that the same individual would have godparents of both a health Mass which is favored by Spanish speakers and a rutuco which is an indigenous custom. But the usual child in our agrarian society would find himself with four sets of padrinos standing between him and hunger should anything happen to his father and mother.

This is how compadrazco functioned and still functions in parts of Peru, although few urban dwellers would believe it. Compadrazco in urban Latin America has become as formal and meaningless as its counterpart in other parts of the world.

This has repercussions in the life of our callejón. There, while family institutions have decayed, compadrazco has disintegrated. What might have been a strong support for the volatile family has now little more significance than a greeting card. And Juan, with a sore foot, finds that hunger is a word with a very real meaning.

Geographical Mobility

In spite of the disorganization apparent in the social life of the callejón its population is not transient. The 30 families have resided in the same rooms in the same callejón an average of 11.9 years, and there is little difference between the families whose heads were born in Lima and those whose heads were born in the sierra and migrated to Lima. The 13 families of which the mother and father were both born in the sierra have lived in the callejón an average of 11.4 years. Incidentally the population is almost equally divided between parents of sierra origin and those from the coast. Of the 60 persons who act as parents in the 30 families, 29 were born in the sierra, 22 in Lima, and 8 elsewhere on the coast, and only one falls outside the classification by virtue of her birth in the Amazon basin. There is no distinction made among Lima, coastal, and sierra families. Only one person was remarked upon as being distinctively "Indian" and he was a young man who had come very recently from the sierra to live with his brother and sister-in-law who are old residents of the callejón. He had some difficulty breaking with sierra customs. But the rest of the sierra people, even those who had lived as short a time as four years in the callejón and a little longer in Lima, have broken with the more integrated and organized society of the agricultural sierra and entered easily into the society of social insulation, secularization, and institutional breakdown of the callejón.

Social Mobility

The breakdown and the lack of mobility mechanisms are responsible for the stability. The breakdown has eradicated nearly all possibilities for gaining prestige within the callejón and the limited mobility routes make it nearly impossible to get out--except to the barriadas which are little if any improvement. The institutional breakdown has eliminated leadership patterns and prestige devices. The family was once an extended family rather than the present decaying nuclear family. It then had a variety of connections, a long memory, and pride. The headship of a large, well-run family marked a man for respect and community leadership. A man could gain a

position of respect through the ceremonial kinship system. Money and consideration meant he could generously become padrino and take on the bonds of obligation and respect inherent in his co-parenthood with a large number of his friends. The cofradía was an even more formal and explicit way in which money could be used--not as a prestige symbol in itself--but to pay the large expenses involved in sponsoring a communal feast day. A person might impoverish himself buying barrels of chicha, cases of beer and aguardiente, several sheep and hogs, the services of a band or two, and a great variety of fireworks--but his position would be established. He would be remembered as the man who was the capitán of the fiesta of the Virgin of Mercy in 1952.

Without these devices prestige differences are minimized and the man who is driven to distinguish himself must think in terms that are outside his immediate surroundings and system. Money is not the answer. Money takes up a disproportionate space in the interviews and in nearly every conversation in the callejón, but it is the result of concern with subsistence not prestige. The talk concerns prices of basic articles as bread, rice, clothes, and shoes--not a comparison of income. The wealthiest man of the callejón makes 2,000 soles a month--more than twice the normal wage. But he is not admired for it, there is no way he can spend it for prestige purposes, and he has solved the problem by having more children than anyone else in the callejón (11).

Thus the emphasis on escape and the great concern with the education of the children. Money is not a means of mobility. Education is. A callejonero who might win the lottery and buy the callejón would still remain a callejonero. But if he should succeed in giving a professional education to his son, his son would become gente decente. One difficulty is there is almost nothing in between. There is little distinction made between unskilled and skilled workers. A callejonero who becomes a skilled patternmaker is still a callejonero. Success in trade means almost as little socially. Therefore, Lima is in the process of becoming top heavy with lawyers who provoke disputes to stimulate business, physicians who are miserably paid but who remain in Lima rather than become "provincials" (where they are badly needed), and university professors who enter politics to supplement their meager stipends. Meanwhile, Lima suffers an acute shortage of skilled workers, and trade is overwhelmingly in the hands of foreigners. The social disorganization of the lower economic class has made education bear a tremendous burden in the mobility process. The result has been to inhibit the formation of a middle economic class and to force a hothouse growth of a professional class with an insufficient economic base.

In this way the upper class which has heretofore resisted the disorganizing factor apparent in the lower class is being made to feel the distorting effect which a solitary and inadequate mobility route can bring to bear on the entire urban society.

Richard W. Patch